



There was a sickening thump as the body hit the ground

# POST-HYPNOTIC

By **SAMUEL MINES**

*When Professor Manning's psychology experiment takes a wrong turn, it proves to be a problem for the police!*

**I**N APRIL, the tall, old-fashioned campus lamps were lighted at seven and full dark had come half an hour later.

Kenny Tomas, pre-med, made his way down the curving flagstone path like a message in Morse code dashes—appearing and disappearing at regular intervals.

In one of the wide spaces of dark between the round pools of light cast by the lamp posts, he detected movement and heard sounds. A familiar silvery tinkle of laughter, the paler shine of a girl's dress against a man's dark coat.

Tomas stepped off the path, his

feet noiseless on soft spring grass. Two strides brought him to the bench where girl and man were locked in each other's arms. They moved apart without panic.

"A peeping Tom," said the shadow on the bench.

Tomas peered at him.

"Reynolds?" he asked. "Thought it was you." His eyes swiveled to the faint oval gleam of the girl's face. "And Aimee Harper, of course. The siren. Reynolds, hasn't anyone warned you?"

"Of course," said the girl. "I've warned him myself." Her laughter rang out again.

“Go away,” Reynolds said. “Go to your psychology precept and learn about human emotions. Learn about love.”

“I’m going,” Tomas said. “And you and Harpy—excuse—Harper—are due there too, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“Well, go!”

“I want to say something first,” Tomas said grimly. “Even if it gets me a punch in the nose. I like you, Reynolds, and for that reason alone I’m committing the unpardonable sin of shoving in where I’m not wanted.”

“You certainly aren’t.”

“Okay. But I want to say, and I want you to remember later, that I warned you about this dame. She’s no good. And it’s not just a little matter of being a wolf in skirts. Sure, she’s had romances with every male on the campus— but it’s more than that. She’s got the hellish ability somehow to hurt, to warp you—”

“That’ll be enough of that!” Reynolds said, coming to his feet.

Tomas did not mistake the rising anger in his tones. The pre-med stepped back.

“Okay,” he said. “I did my duty.”

“Very nobly done,” interposed Aimee Harper. “Has anyone stopped to think that what may be bothering our distinguished medical colleague is a slight case of jealousy?”

Tomas turned his back and moved away without looking back. He went up the flagstones again, plunging into dark, emerging like a swimmer into the round circles of light, disappearing again.

Behind him he left silence.

Another shadow approached as he neared Professor Manning’s door. He identified it by its bulk.

“That you, Muscles?”

“You were expecting maybe the Thin Man?”

There was plenty of John “Muscles” Larue, right guard, captain of the football team, wrestling team, and star of the shot-put event in track. He loomed over Tomas, casting a shadow a head taller and twice as wide.

“Hiya, kid,” Muscles went on. “Know your stuff for tonight?”

“Reasonably well,” Tomas said. “Psychology’s pretty much common sense, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know how common it is,” Muscles replied, “but if it is, I ought to have it. Nobody around here’s any commoner than me.”

He rapped the door gently with his knuckles and it was opened hastily by Professor Manning, evidently trying to save it from destruction. The psychology mentor was a chubby little man with a good-humored face and a nearly bald pate that gleamed in any stray beam of light.

“Come in gentlemen,” he invited. “Mr. Conklin is the only one here—on time, I might add.”

“The boy genius,” Muscles Larue grunted, lumbering in ahead of Tomas. “Hiya, Elbert.”

ELBERT CONKLIN, editor of the Campus paper, “Grisette,” lifted his nose from a book and showed a thin, sardonic face with an affected lift of one black eyebrow.

“Arrowsmith and Gargantua,” he murmured.

“Don’t go calling Kenny an ape,” Muscles said as he grinned. “He’s sensitive.”

Professor Manning appeared amused. He went to answer another knock on the door and ushered in Aimee Harper and Frank Reynolds. Seen in the light, the girl was strikingly beautiful. It was a dark, exotic, lush beauty, smoldering, as though

always on the point of bursting into violent flame.

Knowing the importance of a good entrance, she managed to halt, posed in the doorway, while Frank Reynolds lifted her tweed jacket from her shoulders. Tomas saw that she held every eye in the room.

Reynolds, taking her coat, was looking at her hungrily. Across the room, Elbert Conklin pointed his sharp face her way and let that left eyebrow slide up in a mocking gesture of dislike as though he were seeing through her and wanted to let her know he did.

Larue, looming large against the Professor's massed bookcases, stared at her with a carefully impassive face. But under that controlled mask some hurriedly buried emotion stirred and showed itself for a moment.

Even Professor Manning had stopped fussing with his papers and was watching her. But Tomas could not read the man's expression. He only knew that the usual good humor of that round face was almost gone, the mien solemn.

As for himself—unconsciously his eyes lifted to the mirror on the opposite wall and he was shocked at what he saw. His face was drawn with bitterness and hurt, and tight with anger. So this was how he looked to the others!

"Our discussion tonight," Professor Manning said, clearing his throat hastily, "concerns one of the side issues of psychology, the phenomenon of hypnosis. I asked you to do a bit of reading in preparation. What have you discovered, Mr. Larue?"

"Well," Muscles said, "the first thing I wanted to make sure of was that hypnotism wasn't a fake."

"And are you satisfied of that?"

"Yes. It can be done. There's been a lot of faking connected with it because it

seems like magic, so lots of phonies have used it to swindle people."

"Very good," the Professor said. "Anything else?"

"It holds great fascination for many people," Aimee Harper added, "because of its apparent mystical powers. As such, it appeals to those interested in the occult."

"That's the unfortunate side of it," explained Professor Manning. "That it should be tied up with magic and spiritualism and fortune telling. In the hands of a physician or psychiatrist it is an extremely useful agent in dealing with neurotics, because of the great influence on the mind of suggestions made during hypnosis. Have you anything to add to that, Mr. Larue?"

"Yeh. The most interesting thing about hypnotic suggestion is that while you can make the subject do all kinds of silly things like crawling around and barking like a dog, you can't make him steal or kill somebody. If you try that he'll wake up."

"Do you know why?"

"It's obvious," Elbert Conklin put in. "Any suggestion which is repugnant to the individual's code of morals produces such a conflict in his subconscious that he resists obeying the order and hence breaks out of the hypnotic trance."

"Precisely," the Professor said. "Now tonight, it was my plan to try an experiment in actual hypnosis. It is not difficult. Have any of you ever seen one performed?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Would one of you like to volunteer to be guinea pig tonight?"

Surprisingly, it was Aimee Harper who made the first move forward, but Muscles Larue heaved up and dominated the scene.

“Take me, Professor Manning,” he urged. “I’m the dumbest one here so you won’t have any trouble putting me under.”

“It has little to do with intelligence.” Manning smiled. “All that is required is the cooperation of the subject. I couldn’t hypnotize you if you resisted, Mr. Larue, no matter how—uh—‘dumb’ you might be.”

As he talked, he brought forward a small lamp and a tiny propeller-like fan with shiny blades. He focused the lamp upon the fan and then set the fan to spinning so that its bright, revolving blades made a shimmering blur in the air.

“Now the lights,” he said.

Elbert Conklin snapped the main switch and the room was in darkness except for the spot of light concentrated on the spinning blades.

“Mr. Larue, keep your eyes fixed on the blades. Relax, don’t fight me, let your mind slip where it will. The rest of you, try to keep awake.”

Then in a soft monotone, Manning began to tell the big football guard that he was sleepy, that he was dozing off, that he was going to sleep—over and over and over.

KNOWING this was the way it was done, Tomas still felt it was corny. Skepticism tickled him, made him want to laugh. And when, in a few minutes, he saw Larue’s eyelids droop and close, he felt sure the big man was faking. But Professor Manning had no such doubts.

“He’s asleep,” he announced. “Lights, Conklin.”

When the lights went up, they all stared at Larue. The varsity champ seemed fast asleep, chin sunk on chest. He paid no attention to their excited crowding around, their talk.

“Now to make this a real

experiment,” Professor Manning said, “I propose this. We’ll have someone give Mr. Larue a suggestion, to operate post-hypnotically. This suggestion will be known only to the person giving it. The proof of the pudding will then be whether or not Mr. Larue performs this task so clearly and decisively that there will be no doubt that the rest of us can recognize it without being told. Is that clear?”

Everyone nodded. The Professor looked around the group and pointed to Elbert Conklin.

“Mr. Conklin, you whisper in Mr. Larue’s ear the errand you wish to send him upon. Have him do it and meet us in half an hour at our psychology room, six-o-eight in the Science Building.”

Elbert Conklin thought a moment. Then his eyebrow slid up and he nodded. At the Professor’s gesture he stepped over to Muscles and, leaning forward, whispered urgently into the apparently unconscious ear. None of them could hear what he had said.

When he straightened up, the Professor moved forward.

“Mr. Larue,” he said, “when you awake, you will carry out Mr. Conklin’s order. Then you will meet us at room six-o-eight in the Science Building. Now, wake up, Mr. Larue!”

He clapped his hands sharply. Muscles stirred, lifted his head, opened his eyes and blinked.

“It worked,” he said. “Did I do anything silly?”

They reassured him he had been most decorous. And then suddenly he cocked his head to one side like a setter dog.

“Say, just remembered something important I forgot,” he said. “Could I be excused, Professor? I got to attend to this right away.”

“Go right ahead,” Manning said.

When the door closed behind Muscles, the Professor gave the group their instructions.

“Split up, all of you, and approach the Science Building separately. I want no pairs at all, so there will be no question of collusion or anything like that. Leave one by one.”

Kenny Tomas left promptly. He felt depressed, let down. Vanity, he told himself. There was nothing left of the flame which had blazed between Aimee Harper and himself, only his hurt pride at the discovery she had been fooling and he had been sincere. She took over every eligible male that way, sometimes for nothing more than the excitement of taking him away from another girl. Yet the vision of her in Frank Reynold’s arms persisted and he cursed himself for a juvenile fool.

Fleetingly he wondered how the others felt. Conklin, he knew had had some sort of romantic attachment to her, though he masked any emotion under that supercilious raised eyebrow. As for Muscles Larue, the big man had rushed her madly one football season when she had accepted his attentions gladly because he was king of the campus. But when she had tired, as she did, he seemed to accept the worship of the other coeds as an easy substitute.

In a gesture of defiance Tomas stopped at the Honey Bowl and had himself a hot fudge sundae with marshmallow and chopped nuts on top.

Consuming this used up enough of his half hour so that when he had finished, it was time to start back to the Science Building.

Approaching, he saw the twin lights over the main doorway, but no light showed upstairs.

He was almost under the building when a scream split the night air and something fell from above.

Tomas ducked instinctively. He saw a flash of whirling limbs and flying, pale skirt, and then there was a sickening thump on the ground. He broke from his frozen trance and dashed forward. The swift crunch of feet sounded on gravel and from the shadows, Professor Manning hurried, to crouch with him in wordless terror over the body of Aimee Harper.

“Sh-she’s dead!” Tomas whispered. “Neck broken.”

“Did you see it?” Professor Manning demanded. “Did you see what happened, Mr. Tomas?”

“She fell from up there—from six-o-eight, I think!”

More steps pounded toward them. Reynolds was first. He gave a horrified gasp and dropped on his knees above the girl’s crumpled body.

“How—how—” he stammered.

Larue and Conklin pounded up.

“We heard a scream—”

“One of you stay here with her,” Professor Manning said hurriedly. “Reynolds—”

“I’ll stay,” the boy muttered brokenly.

“The rest of you come with me. I want to see that room. Then we’ve got to call the police.”

The lights were working when they came into room six-o-eight. Everything looked normal. The window was open, wide.

“She must have come in here in the dark,” Conklin said, his face drawn, his eyebrow in place for once. “Didn’t see the window open and fell out.”

Manning and Tomas crossed to the open window and leaned out to look. A ledge ran around the building about three

feet below. Beyond its outer edge they could see Frank Reynolds crouching over the still body of Aimee Harper. He seemed to be stroking her hair.

Manning and the pre-med student looked at each other. Then the Professor walked to the telephone and called the police.

A LIEUTENANT from Homicide, two detectives and three patrolmen answered the summons. They covered the ground rapidly, photographing, checking for fingerprints and footprints and all the hundred other details.

Then the lieutenant brought his detectives and Reynolds back into room six-o-eight. The body of Aimee Harper was taken away.

“Before notifying the college president and beginning an official inquiry,” the police officer said, “with all the red tape that it involves, I’d like to get your stories right here—you who were connected with this.”

Tomas and Professor Manning exchanged a glance. The professor nodded as though giving the boy permission to speak.

“I think we can do more than that, Lieutenant,” the student said. “We’ll give you your murderer.”

He waited then, while shock held the others in the room.

Elbert Conklin’s eyebrow went up.

“You mean,” he said deliberately, “that the murderer is one of us?”

“That’s exactly what he means,” Professor Manning replied. “Mr. Tomas and I saw the solution simultaneously.”

“I’m waiting,” the police officer said.

Tomas told the story of the night’s experiment in hypnosis, including his own walk from the Honey Bowl and his sight

of Aimee hurtling down from above.

The lieutenant turned and looked at Muscles Larue.

“Is he still hypnotized?” he asked. “Or is he out of it now?”

“Oh, he’s out of it,” Professor Manning assured him. “The post-hypnotic influence is a very strange thing. The subject is completely normal after being awakened, yet he has this strange impulse, which he himself cannot understand, to go and do something. And he is not happy until he has done it. Once that’s off his mind, he is as free from suggestion as you or I.”

“What was the suggestion?” the lieutenant demanded. “What was the order given him?”

Muscles looked blank.

“Search me,” he said.

“He wouldn’t know,” the Professor corroborated.

The officer swung on Conklin.

“What was the order you gave him?”

The editor flushed, then went pale again. But he braced himself defiantly.

“I ordered him to come back here, wait for Aimee and kill her when she came!”

Frank Reynolds sobbed aloud and started for Conklin. A patrolman caught him and held him back. Conklin’s nervous glance switched to the struggling youth.

“Don’t be a fool, Frank!” he said sharply. “I was only doing it to break up the experiment. You know that you can’t make a hypnotized man commit murder!”

“Mr. Conklin has a reputation for maliciousness to maintain,” Manning said quietly.

“But she was murdered!” the lieutenant said. “So what about that, Mr. Conklin?”

“Of course she wasn’t!” the editor

snapped. “She walked in here in the dark, not putting on any lights—maybe she had a date with Frank there—and she fell out the window. It was an accident.”

“No, it wasn’t,” Tomas said evenly. “She was murdered.”

“There’s a ledge down below this window,” the pre-med said. “If she’d fallen out of the window she’d have landed on the ledge. Somebody threw her out—threw her with strength enough to clear that ledge and go sailing down and out! See how far from the building she landed?”

There was silence again. Conklin glared around wildly.

“But it’s impossible!” he shouted. His voice cracked foolishly and no one noticed. “You can’t make a hypnotized man kill! Professor Manning said so!”

“Wait a minute!” Muscles Larue bellowed. “Are you tryin’ to pin this on me? How do we know what you were doing all this time? Why is everybody so sure it was me who threw her out the window?”

“Because, Muscles,” Tomas said. “You’re the only one strong enough to throw her that far.”

“But I couldn’t!” the big man roared. “You heard the Professor—”

“I did. I heard him say that no one could make a hypnotized man do something that was morally repugnant to

him, like stealing or killing. But suppose, Muscles—suppose killing was not repugnant to you? Then what?”

There was a stunned silence. Then complete comprehension broke on Larue’s face, and with a bellow of sheer fury he charged for Conklin.

It took the combined efforts of all the policemen to pull him off, and Conklin was half strangled when he was at last released.

With order restored, the police lieutenant found himself chewing on his pencil.

“So Larue killed her,” he said. “But he did it under hypnotic orders from Conklin—so who is the killer?”

“That,” said Professor Manning, “is something for the court to decide. All we can tell you is this: Conklin, out of malice, made that suggestion to Larue. Whether he knew Larue was capable of murder or not, we’ll never know. Maybe he did it just to break up the experiment, as he says. But Larue was morally capable of murder. If you dig back in his past far enough, Lieutenant, you’ll probably find corroboration of that. And so Larue had no struggle with his conscience, but did go ahead and commit the murder.

“The strange thing about it is that he did it subconsciously, under hypnotic control and not really aware of what he was doing. The problem therefore is— which of these men is the real murderer?”